



# **REFINE Project England, Wales and Northern Ireland Country Report**

## **“General Principles for the Recognition/Validation/Accreditation of informal and non-formal learning”**

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## Acknowledgments

Continuum has acted as the lead partner for the REFINE project which is a multi-national EU funded research development project coordinated by the European Universities Continuing Education Network (EUCEN). The fieldwork reported on here was undertaken by Professor Bob Johnson and I would like to thank Bob for all his efforts. As in any piece of collaborative development we were highly dependant on a range of partners who acted as our partner consultant group. We gratefully acknowledge the contribution from this group. A list of the organisations involved is given in Appendix 2 and 5a. It is hoped that this report will contribute to further development of opportunities for learners throughout Europe to have their learning achievements recognised and valued in ways which will enhance their engagement with and benefit from formal, non-formal and informal learning.

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## **Executive Summary**

The proposed, general principles (Code of Practice) for the accreditation of informal and non-formal learning (APEL).

## **General goals**

- Give a Quality Assurance framework for the validation/accreditation/recognition of informal and non-formal learning
- Provide stakeholder groups with a common tool for APEL
- Develop a tool that can be integrated into a European credit and qualifications framework
- Create a tool, that will contribute to the concern of the EU to reinforce and valorise voluntary commitment and participation in learning opportunities

## **Aims**

- Ensure transparency in the validation/accreditation/recognition process
- Ensure that the learners and/or their sponsors (e.g. employers) are treated equitably, in a fair and impartial manner by the providers of the process.
- To provide the stakeholders with a set of guidelines that are context appropriate

## **General framework**

The tool comes in three parts:

The recognition/validation/accreditation of informal and non-formal learning for

- Learners/candidates and their sponsors
- Delivery institutions e.g. universities
- Monitors and regulators

See Appendix 6 for a full description of the tool.

## 1 - The timeliness of the REFINE Project

1.1 The European scene is advancing rapidly on a number of fronts developed by different interest groups. The Bologna Declaration/Process, in which the education ministers have an avowed aim of forming a European Higher Education Area by 2010, began in 1999. The ministers meet formally every 2 years, Prague (2001), Berlin (2003) and Bergen (2005) and move the agenda forward more rapidly than many of the educational institutions can sustain. Following initial agreements to two cycles of qualifications, a third has been developed to include 'doctorates'. Further developments have included the recognition of lifelong learning and the aim to develop the existing European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) into a truly viable and workable system which can be implemented across Europe.

1.2 In November 2002, the European Commission issued the Copenhagen Declaration, which amongst other things looked at the development of a credit transfer system for vocational education and training, ECVET.

1.3 In January 2004, the European Commission published 'Common European Principles for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning' – notes for a meeting of its expert group. At the same time, a number of European projects have been funded to underpin and support the initiatives. In the area of recognising informal and non-formal learning, (generally referred to in the UK as the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning, APEL) parallel projects are in hand to investigate the possibility of developing credit processes for vocational and academic learning. The Transfine project, 2002-2003, explored the relationship between formal and informal learning. REFINE builds on the work of Transfine but has a particular focus on the development of tools. The UK Transfine report co-ordinated by Continuum provided a UK-wide survey of education and training providers of the state of play in APEL provision and developments (Storan, 2003).

1.4 Given the situation in Europe and the UK the REFINE project is most timely. In the UK over the past 20 years Higher Education Institutions HEIs, have been practising, developing, implementing and refining the processes for APEL. In addition, they have developed the infra-structures to support the recognition of **ALL** learning 'wherever and however it takes place'.

1.5 The Southern England Consortium for CATS (SEEC) has been at the forefront of APEL developments with for example a number of publications by and for its members. This includes, the SEEC *Code of Practice for APEL*, first written in 1995 with an updated version produced in 2003.

1.6 A survey of the application of APEL in institutions of SEEC members led to '*Models of APEL and Quality Assurance*', Johnson 2002 in which advice is proffered on how institutions might consider the provision of APEL. This incorporates a 'seven stages' process when initiating, developing and refining APEL processes.

1.7 The report of a survey of the practice of credit in all HEIs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNl) commissioned by EWNl Credit Forum, (EWNl 2004) contains a wealth of detail on the practice of APL, APEL and work-based learning (WBL) and provides evidence of the long and valuable practical experience which informs current practice in the UK.

1.8 In October 2004, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) published its own guidelines for APEL for HEI's. Currently, the Qualifications and Curriculum Agency (QCA) dealing mainly, but not exclusively with the provision in Further Education Colleges (FECs) is developing a *Framework for Achievement* (FfA). This scheme includes elements on credit, qualifications, and APEL.

1.9 The development of credit-based provision in the UK was identified in the Transfine project report as being uneven. The absence of a national credit framework in the UK was cited as a particular example of an obstacle to progress being made to widen access for learners to formal learning recognition services.

Nevertheless APEL provision in different forms in HE and FE has continued to both survive and develop from its inception in the 1980's, see "Making Experience Count", (Storan, 1988).

1.10 In the 2000's there has been renewed interest at national and institutional levels in credit-based provision. Recent research carried out by Continuum argues the need to understand credit from a learner's perspective and not just a provider's point of view, see "Mapping the capacity for reform: Credit-based provision in London East (Andreshak-Behrman and Storan, 2004)

## 2 - The REFINE Project in the UK

### 2.1 The 'TOOL'

The aims of the REFINE project are *'to test the tools for a European methodological framework for the recognition of formal and informal learning; to foster transnational and trans-sectoral collaboration and to build understanding of and confidence in the practices and procedures involved'*.

*The objectives are to test*

- a range of tools, e. g. ECTS, the Euro CV, Europass, codes of practice, for the recognition of formal and informal learning*
- tools in a range of different institutional and organizational contexts:'- including FE and HE institutions, awarding bodies, regulatory agencies, youth, adult and community organizations and trade unions.*

A parallel programme is taking place in a number of countries, around 12, each testing a different tool. The idea of a tool carries particular connotations in the UK. In this project the word "tool" is being used in the sense of representing an approach, procedure or type of mechanism that can assist in the development of a framework for the recognition of formal and informal learning.

The focus of the programme was to develop and test the general principles for APEL and to relate this to both the existing European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and also to Common European Principles.

2.2 The lead partner for the project was Continuum, the Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies based at the University of East London. The research and development work was carried out under the direction of Professor John Storan, Continuum Director, with Professor Bob Johnson as Project Officer.

The work plan consisted of two phases:

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| Phase 1 | Develop and test a generic tool  |
| Phase 2 | Develop and test the tool tailored to the requirements of different stakeholders |

### 3 - Phase 1

## Developing & testing a common set of principles for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning

3.1 It was decided at the outset that the REFINE project should take as its starting point the existing work in the area; the Common European Principles and the SEEC Code of Practice for APEL. Both of these would provide important reference points from which to begin to develop a common set of principles as stated for the REFINE project.

3.2 The Common European Principles suggests a single set of principles for

- Formal education and training
- Learning taking place in relation to the labour market
- Learning taking place in relation to voluntary activities, e. g. youth organisations.

It consists of six principles or points of concern. These are listed below:

1. Purpose of the validation of APEL (in UK called either assessment or accreditation)
2. Individual rights: ownership of the results and rights of appeal
3. Institutional obligations: especially clarity of understanding
4. Confidence and trust: transparency of procedures , standards and assessment criteria, based upon clear information
5. Impartiality: separation of roles of trainer and assessor; code of conduct for assessors and systematic initial and continuing training
6. Credibility and legitimacy: validation criteria involving all stakeholders, especially social partners; validation bodies need to be impartial at all levels of the operation.

3.3 As stated earlier, following a long period of extensive practice in England, a code of practice for APEL was published in 1995 and subsequently revised in 2003 (SEEC 1995 and 2003). The code gives guidance to HEIs and other providers, on the strategic and operational aspects of the provision of APEL services.

3.4 It was proposed that the SEEC Code of Practice and the European Principles should be developed further and extended as the EWN tool for REFINE and made available for use by both HEIs **and** other communities such as FECs, Awarding Bodies, Adult and Continuing Education providers, trade unions and similar bodies and organisations. Although primarily designed for use by



institutions and organisations that have the authority to award qualifications, e.g. UK universities and awarding and professional bodies, the SEEC code was seen as sufficiently adaptable in order that regulatory bodies could use it to inform APEL guidance and advice to providers. In addition, those organisations and individuals who are applying for APEL can use the tool to ensure that they are receiving appropriate advice and access to APEL services and are being assessed in a fair and appropriate way. It is important for both regulators and providers to take a proactive approach to APEL provision.

3.5 The resulting tool, called '**General principles for the recognition of formal and informal learning, APEL**' is shown in Appendix 1.

## 3.6 - Phase 1 consultation

Although different consultation methods were considered, it was decided that an emailed questionnaire sent to targeted individuals/organisations combined with a consultation workshop would be both appropriate as well as a most cost effective approach. The respondents, shown in Appendix 2, were each sent a covering letter explaining the purpose of the project, the 'General Principles' tool and a short questionnaire (see Appendix 3). The Project Officer organised a consultation workshop which also brought together a range of our target respondents and provided an opportunity for a face to face discussion to take place.

## 3.7 - Phase 1 preliminary results

The tool is designed essentially in the first instance for use by organisations in the development of quality-assured processes for the implementation and delivery of APEL provision. The European Project manager for REFINE recognised at the outset that the report template originally envisaged for all the partner countries would not therefore be appropriate for recording the testing of the 'tool'.

## 3.8 The main strengths of the tool

The consultation responses indicated that the *General Principles* do provide a highly appropriate framework which can both support and inform the development, delivery and monitoring of provision for the recognition of

informal and non-formal learning. This was a very positive response to proposition testing part of the consultation.

The *General Principles* also appear (from the responses received) to be sufficiently flexible to cover all levels of learning both in higher and further education and also to encompass vocational and academic learning. Furthermore they also appear to be capable of being customised for application in specific education and training contexts.

### **3.9 Adherence to the *General Principles* by organisations – Benefits mentioned**

- candidates for APEL (Informal and non-formal learning) would then:
  - have confidence in the process
  - place greater 'value' upon the credit awarded
  - feel that their learning in non-formal environments is as worthy as that achieved in the classroom
  - see it (APEL) as a means to assist their future development
- Employers/trade unions/adult education organisations significantly welcomed the rigour provided and the credibility of any decision on the award of credit.
- Educational institutions felt confident that adherence to the *General Principles* would give them
  - Credibility with other educational institutions/ employers and other organisations, thereby helping to facilitate the transfer of credit and aid the mobility of candidates.

Regulatory bodies reported that the tool could contribute to their audit processes and thus saw the *General Principles* as enhancing any current procedures or guidance.

### **3.10 Weaknesses of the tool**

The major difficulty is finding a single set of *General Principles* which can be used by all higher and further educational institutions, private /governmental training organisations, awarding bodies, professional bodies including trade unions and quality assurance/inspectorate agencies. If the principles are too abstract the concern would be that they wouldn't be very meaningful and at the same time if they were too specific the danger here would be their relevance would be restricted. As mentioned earlier the fact that in the UK we already had an established code of practice and meant we had a starting point. Add to this

the European principles and we had a reasonably firm basis from which to develop the project tool.

There is a view that there is insufficient emphasis on the candidate with a need to stress the responsibility of the organisations to prepare students/candidates for the process of APEL and to be accountable.

### **3.11 Feedback from tool ‘testers’**

‘Testers’ were very insistent that the *General Principles* should provide a ‘loose’ and ‘flexible’, yet rigorous framework for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

The language, for example, should also be clear and the meaning should be transparent and easy to understand.

The *General Principles* should be flexible enough to allow for differences in culture and environment when applied across national boundaries. Given the autonomy and hence diversity in the UK higher education sector, this is considered to be particularly important.

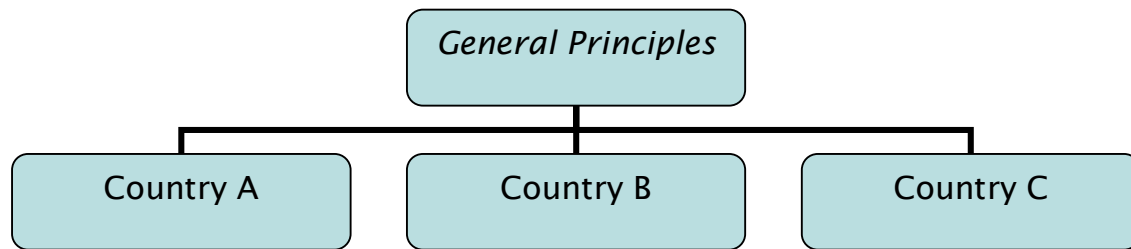
Various suggestions were put forward on how this degree of flexibility might be achieved, including national differences, differing organisations and differing sectors.

Following on from the suggestions to increase the usability and indeed the flexibility of the general principles, it was proposed to develop and test the general principles for use by different participating project partners Three models were considered.

- A. National Differences
- B. Differing organisations
- C. Differing sectors

#### Model A. National differences

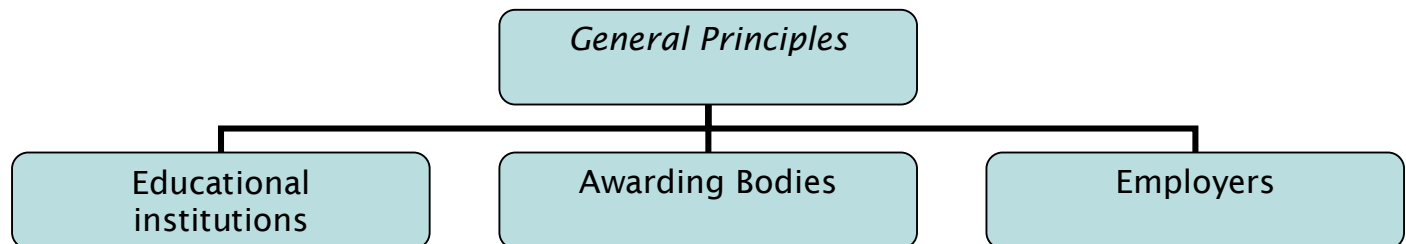
It was agreed that the differing educational, cultural and social aspects in European countries would lead to individual country codes within the wider European framework of general principles being developed.



The principles should be appropriate to all stakeholder bodies concerned with the recognition be it vocational, academic, and work-based learning achievements.

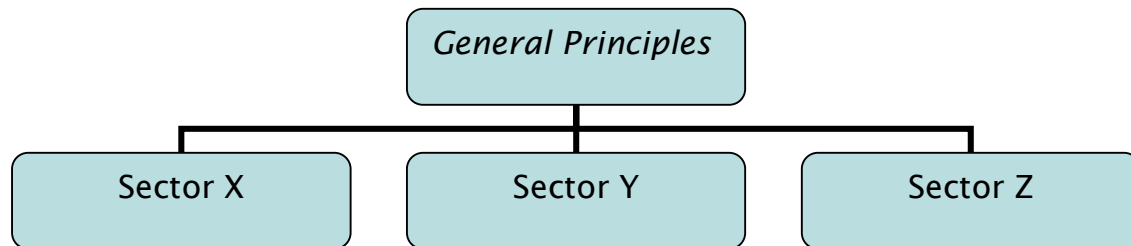
#### Model B. Differing Organisations


However, since the proposed tool is one for quality assurance of the accreditation of informal and non-formal learning, it was felt that model b), developing and testing a tool tailored to the different stakeholders in the process would be most valuable and capable of the widest use.



### Model C. Differing Sectors

Although this looked attractive on the surface, it soon became apparent that the definition of sectors could and actually did vary quite considerably across Europe. Hence the development and testing of a sectoral model within the UK would have limited value.





## **4 - Phase 2**

### **Developing & testing sub sets of the general principles for different stakeholders**

#### **4.1 The stakeholders/constituencies**

Although there are very many stakeholders, it was felt that if the proposed tool(s) were going to be of maximum use across Europe, then the number should be as small as possible. In the event it was decided to breakdown the stakeholders into three main categories, these are ‘users’/candidates, ‘deliverers’ and ‘monitors’.

##### **Users**

It is of paramount importance to recognise that the scheme is user referenced and should be designed to facilitate the users’ access to, and progress through the APEL process. In developing and consulting on this particular “tool” we have been mindful of the needs of diverse user groups. The tool is intended therefore to enhance the user’s experience of APEL and related provision and this ultimately will be the measure by which its value should be judged.

##### **Deliverers**

These are the institutions and organisations, who deliver, advise, guide and assess candidates and who ‘award’ the credit for the informal and non-formal learning. In the UK this is normally done by the Higher Education providers (universities, colleges of FE, professional bodies and similar).

##### **Monitors**

In England, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) oversee and monitor the quality of all educational provision within HEIs and Further Education Colleges (FECs). In other European countries this work is carried out by government agencies. In addition where professional bodies have delegated the APEL process to other deliverers, e.g. universities, they too may be regarded as monitors. The monitoring role normally therefore incorporates a quality assessment and enhancement function.

## 4.2 Bespoke principles for each stakeholder group

It was proposed therefore to ask each stakeholder group involved in the consultation to identify those general principles which have particular relevance to their role and responsibilities. The different configurations of principles for each stakeholder group are shown in Appendix 4. Using the numbering system for the general principles as shown in Appendix 1, the principles for each stakeholder are summarised in the table below.

Principle	Users	Deliverers	Monitors
1	x	x	x
2		x	x
3	x	x	
4	x	x	
5		x	
6		x	x
7		x	
8	x	x	x
9	x	x	x

## 4.3 Methodology

The questionnaire was sent to a sample from each stakeholder group, including those representing the youth and voluntary sector. It was also sent to all the European partners in the REFINE project to enable partners to take account of the principles in the development of their tools. The ideas and proposals were also tested in a number of workshops, seminars and conferences (a list is given in Appendix 4). Respondents were asked to scrutinise the tool in the context of their area of responsibility and provide comments and feedback. In addition, it was recognised that it would be valuable to also seek views from stakeholders on the other group(s) which for example had a regulatory function. For example, the deliverers of the process, being in the middle so to speak, will not only have their own quality assurance (QA) requirements, but may also be in a position to comment upon the QA aspects from the users/learners point of view and may also have a view about the QA requirements to be followed by the monitors.

Users/Candidates
Deliverers
Monitors

(See Appendix 5 for a copy of the questionnaire and explanatory letter.)

#### 4.4 Summary of stakeholder comments

Do you agree with the list of principles in the draft General Principles for your group?

*Learners, deliverers and monitors* all 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the principles for their own group

Which principles would you omit/add from the draft General Principles?

- None of the *learners, deliverers and monitors* wanted to add to the list of principles.
- None of the *learners, deliverers and monitors* wanted to delete any of the principles proposed for their group

*'All principles apply'*

Do you have any comments on the wording of the descriptions attached to each of the principles?

#### 4.5 Comments from users

In general there were very few comments from the respondents in the 'learners'/users group. *'The descriptions are well expressed'* was a common response.

Other comments included

*'Principle 4 Not clear. Roles and responsibilities of all staff should be clarified.'*

*'Principle 5, making APEL part of quality assurance cycle of the organisation'*

#### 4.6 Deliverers' comments

Limited suggestions for re-wording the principles *'All above ok'* was a typical response.

Specific comments included

*PrincipleNo.4 "important to make explicit the roles and responsibilities of all partners."*



*Principle No.4      Reword last sentence: "Information on the responsibilities of the learners must/should be clear and readily available." [Original wording can sound slightly ambiguous]*

#### **4.7    Comments from monitors**

There were limited responses from monitors. One set of comments reminded the project team that a number of different terms are used for much the same thing. The following comment came in response to the wording in principle 1.

In Scotland we are using the broader term 'recognition' (RPL) rather than 'accreditation' or 'assessment' to embrace a broader range of activities linked to valuing prior learning as a means of facilitating further learning and development. Practitioners across the different sectors have welcomed a shift to this term. The concept of recognition also fits more easily with Principles 8 and 9.

#### **4.8    Comments from all stakeholder groups regarding the customisation of the principles**

"What specific guidance would you suggest you might need to accompany the draft principles with a view to maximising its use and value?"

This question was included in the survey in an attempt to better understand how the principles could/should be customised to meet the requirement of particular contexts... All groups responded with some excellent and practiced ideas to recommend for the next stages in the implementation of the general principles.

The comments can be grouped into three areas

- The credit and qualifications framework
- Wording and definitions
- Operational
- Quality assurance
- Practice examples

#### **4.9    Credit and qualifications framework: related comments**

It is widely recognised within the UK (e.g. SEEC 2003, Johnson 2002), that for the accreditation of informal and non-formal learning to flourish, there is first of all the need for a credit system to be in place, where credit is determined by the volume of learning and also the level of learning. In the UK one approach which has been influential is an outcomes-based system, identified by learning

outcomes, which in turn are defined by levels descriptors which illustrates the qualities and characteristics of learning achievements associated with different formal learning levels. The value of a credit framework is enhanced by the co-existence of a qualifications framework.

*(Informal and non-formal) learning against Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria which have been developed and are awarded in accordance with CQFW*

#### **4.10 Wording and definitions:**

The same words in different countries have different meanings. Indeed the same word in the same country can be interpreted differently. For instance in France the word 'validation' is used, whereas in the UK 'accreditation' is used.

*Accreditation is a word that has other meaning, especially in an EU context. Accreditation Councils in Germany and Switzerland etc*

In the UK the phrase accreditation of prior learning (APEL) is taken to mean the accreditation of informal and non-formal learning. Indeed the acronym, APEL, is often interpreted more widely to include current and future learning in these situations. There are other terms in use that drop the 'P' in APEL, e.g. ACEL.

Guidance may also be required on 'what is meant by

- *Non-certificated learning*
- *Experiential learning*

#### **4.11 Operations:**

Operational issues identified by respondents include the following:

*The implementation of APEL will be driven by cost, by institutional confidence in accrediting learning.  
Guidance on how APEL can contribute to organisation's staff development strategy, some practical examples of use and contact points for further advice.*

*Ought there not to be some guidance in a code of practice on equal opportunities and APEL - the needs of disadvantaged groups - disability, speakers of other languages etc;*

*Some guidance will be required to assess the level of the thinking and skill processes that lie behind the experiences and learning submitted as evidence for APEL.*

*Specific guidance could include examples of the way in which the principles might be implemented. Such guidance would probably need to be country or indeed sector –specific to be meaningful to users.*

#### **4.12 Quality assurance:**

Several respondents pointed out that within the UK there are a number of different guides on quality to assure APEL (sic informal and non-formal learning). The major one in England is the QAA Guide to APL (2004) which is supplemented by the SEEC (2005) Companion guide, which demonstrates the close correlation between the QAA guide and the SEEC Code of Practice (SEEC 2003). Some professional bodies, e.g. Nursing and Midwifery Council have produced their own QA guides.

*We would as NMC require institutions to refer to the guidance that we have produced and that of the QAA.*

*A defining QA document of good practice similar to that produced by the Network for Accrediting Young People's Achievements, (NfAYPA).*

#### **4.13 Practice examples**

The respondents here referred to the value of supporting literature and promotional materials containing examples of the wide variety of learning situations, outside the classroom that can provide a basis for the recognition of the learning which is taking and has taken place. There was also stress upon giving examples of 'real people' who had been awarded credit for informal or non-formal learning and had used it to either gain access to, or access with credit to a formal programme of learning leading to a qualification.

## 5 - The proposed tool

The results of the REFINE project in England, Wales and Northern Ireland show quite clearly that there is support for a 'tool' which can be used at the European level to assure the quality of the validation/accreditation of informal and non-formal learning within the constituent countries. Furthermore there is substantial evidence that there is great merit in having variations of the tool for different stakeholders. Evidence suggests however, that the number of groups of stakeholders should be small. Over-prescription could lead to inflexibility and hinder the progress of APEL. After considering a number of ways of defining the groups,(see REFINE interim report) it was felt that the most effective way is to define the stakeholders as users/learners, deliverers/universities and monitors/regulators.

The proposed tool appears in Appendix 6.

## 6 - The tool: European issues and the experiences within the UK

Using a combination of the SEEC Code of Practice and the Common European Principles as a reference point, the tool has been developed to reflect the discussions and decisions reached within the European context. This section shows how the principles within the tool correspond to the various points.

6.1 The Common European Principles consist of *six principles* summarised below and cross-referenced to the REFINE proposed tool for recognising informal and non-formal learning.

- *purpose of the validation of APEL (in UK called either assessment or accreditation)*  
Principles 1, 2 and 8
- *Individual rights: ownership of the results and rights of appeal*  
Principle 9 addresses this point
- *Institutional obligations: especially clarity of understanding*  
Principles 2, 3 and 4,
- *Confidence and trust: transparency of procedures, standards and assessment criteria, based upon clear information*  
Principles 2, 6 and 7
- *Impartiality: separation of roles of trainer and assessor; code of conduct for assessors and systematic initial and continuing training*  
Principle 7
- *Credibility and legitimacy: validation criteria involving all stakeholders, especially social partners; validation bodies need to be impartial at ALL levels of the operation.*  
Principles 4, 5 and 6

6.2 The Common European Principles for the accreditation of competencies within ECVETS are contained in the follow-up to the Copenhagen Declaration, the Council Resolution of 19 December 2002, the work programmes on the Future Objectives and, in particular, the Joint Interim Report “*Education and*

*Training 2010* “, February 2004. The principles are set out under the following main headings. The proposed REFINE general principles are mapped alongside.

- *Individual entitlements*

The identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should, in principle, be a voluntary matter for the individual. There should be equal access and equal and fair treatment for all individuals. The privacy and rights of the individual are to be respected.

REFINE principle 9

- *Obligations of stakeholders*

Stakeholders should establish, in accordance with their rights, responsibilities and competences, systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. These should include appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. Stakeholders should provide guidance, counselling and information about these systems and approaches to individuals.

REFINE principles 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6. In addition the REFINE proposal is that there is a sub set of general principles for each stakeholders, viz. learners, deliverers and monitors.,

- *Confidence and trust*

The processes, procedures and criteria for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms.

REFINE principles 4 and 5

- *Credibility and legitimacy*

Systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should respect the legitimate interests ensure the balanced participation of the relevant stakeholders.

REFINE principle 8 and 9

- *Impartiality*

The process of assessment should be impartial and mechanisms should be put in place to avoid any conflict of interest. The professional competence of those who carry out assessment should also be assured.

REFINE principle 7

6.3 In this section the proposed REFINE tool of general principles is mapped against the issues raised by Feutrie (Bergen 2005). There he identified issues which need to be addressed in the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

Two conceptions of validation are simultaneously present in presentations and papers of experts of the European Commission:

- a validation aiming at a formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning by awarding qualifications ;
- a validation without formal recognition, whatever it is, solely for personal valorisation, personal development.

REFINE principle 9 addresses this matter.

What system of reference? What standards are to be used to make validation of non-formal or informal learning more “official”?

The REFINE proposal requires a credit (and qualifications) framework to be in place, which is outcomes-based using learning outcomes founded upon credit level descriptors.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is a powerful tool principally at the disposal of the individual. Companies have not yet really included this procedure in their management of human resources policies.

There has been significant progress within England, where work-based and work-related learning is recognized in many universities (EWN 2004). There is also a considerable amount of work being done in the youth and voluntary sector, by for example, ASDAN using the NfAYPA scheme and by NIACE.

Do arrangements and processes of validation have to converge or must we accept a large difference of practices from one country to another depending on the national position? Of its practices? Of its culture?

The REFINE proposal is intended to be a generic, pan-European set of principles which will need to be supplemented by individual country-specific guidelines to reflect the difference identified by Feutrie.

Validation of non formal and informal learning obliges institutions and stakeholders (public organisations, enterprises, social partners, and voluntary organisations) to face new responsibilities.

It is unclear whether the validation of informal and non-formal learning obliges organisations to face new responsibilities. The experience of the many universities in England who use APEL, have found that their existing responsibilities are easily recast for APEL. However it is the case that many organisations have yet to see the benefits to the individual and thereby to the organisation.

The links with EUROPASS, the new European framework for transparency of qualifications and competences. Can we use the Diploma supplement as a basis?

The Diploma Supplement can be readily adapted to accommodate the recognition of informal and non-formal learning, especially where a country operates a credit framework.

Ministers of Education and Training have decided in May 2004 common principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Among these principles the quality process is central. How do we give guarantees to candidates, to employers and to stakeholders? The first common principle is “confidence about the transparency of procedures, standards and assessment criteria”. This transparency and openness of procedures and demands is of vital importance for the applicants. Is it possible to develop a common procedure for validation in Higher Education?

The REFINE proposal developed in this report addresses such issues and provides an extremely sound base to meet these needs.

6.4 Issues raised by Feutrie concerning validation of non formal and informal learning in higher education have to a large extent been addressed in England and processes and procedures put in place to ensure their success.

6.5 Feutrie (Bergen 2005) *raised a number of questions and topics relevant to testing (assessing) in the domain of non-formal learning:*

- (a) Which functions, formative or summative, are to be fulfilled by the new methodologies (and institutional systems) for identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning?
- (b) The diversity of learning processes and learning contexts raises the question of whether the same kind of reliability can be achieved in this area as in formal education and training.
- (c) The contextual and (partly) tacit character of learning complicates the quest for validity and the question is whether methodologies are properly designed and constructed in order to deal with this issue.



- (d) The matter of reference points ('standards') is a key issue which needs to be addressed. The question is whether domain boundaries (including 'size' and content of competences) are defined in a proper way?

As Feutrie points out these concerns are not peculiar to informal and non-formal learning, but underpin the testing in formal learning too. The long experience in England of using APEL shows that as long as there is a credit (and qualifications) framework, which is outcomes-based, with clear levels, based upon credit level descriptors, then assessment becomes less problematic. The modes and types of assessments, e.g. portfolios may differ but the underlying principles remain the same.

## 7 – The next steps

7.1 There is sufficient evidence based upon the long and varied experience within England, to suggest that the general principles for recognising/validating/accrediting informal and non-formal learning can be readily applied within other countries within Europe. This should be tested by asking all the European partners represented in the REFINE project to give their considered views on the proposed tool. To date only the representative from Greece has responded and has welcomed the proposal and looks forward to introducing a Greek version in the near future.

7.2 The draft final report will be circulated during the week beginning 10<sup>th</sup> October 2005 to all those people who have contributed to the development of the tool. In addition, the draft report will be circulated to all the European partners for their comments and observations.

7.3 The responses will be incorporated into a presentation to be made at the REFINE dissemination conference to be held in Rome in November, where, following the positive reaction at the interim conference in November 2004, it is anticipated that there will be substantial interest in and support for the proposed tool.

## Appendix 1

### **REFINE: General principles for the recognition of Formal and Informal Learning (APEL) – for organisations**

**1. Common definitions are needed to both safeguard and ensure the highest quality arrangements for APEL services.**

APEL is defined as the assessment/accreditation of certificated and non-certificated learning (including the assessment of experiential learning). It is recognised that there are other definitions in use.

**2. A clear statement of the organisation's commitment to APEL should be provided and included in all relevant literature.**

This statement could be included in organisational documentation at a strategic level including mission statements, strategic plans and programme information relating to access and admissions to membership and/or educational/training/developmental programmes. It also should be prominent in information aimed at learners including career development, and the programme handbook.

**3. Organisations should seek to embed APEL processes across their learning strategy and policy.**

Experience to date suggests that APEL arrangements can be introduced into existing provision through, for example, the process of review and validation.

**4. APEL procedures and practices should be properly documented and made available to all.**

Responsibility for all of the stages of the APEL process from initial enquiry to the award of credit should be clearly defined. It is important to make explicit the roles and responsibilities of all staff. Information on the responsibilities of the learners needs to be clear and readily available.

**5. APEL services should be fully integrated within an organisation's quality assurance processes.**

APEL involves academic judgement and can lead to the award of credit. It should be subject to the organisation's quality assurance systems.

**6. APEL policies, procedures, documentation and outcomes should be monitored.**

Monitoring the impact and performance of all stages of the APEL process should contribute to the improvement of learning strategy, policy and operation.

**7. Adequate preparation is required for all persons involved in the APEL process.**

The widest participation of staff in APEL will be necessary. This will require the training and development of staff to improve services to learners.

**8. Organisations should promote the recognition of APEL as a part of the developmental process for the learner**

Organisations should subscribe to the ideal that the recognition of APEL is not an end in itself, but an integral part of lifelong learning and the continuing development of the learner.

**9. Formal recognition of APEL should be available...**

It is important that the learner receives a clear record of the learning which has been recognised. The format of the recognition could be located on a scale from simple 'valuing' to formal certification. Although APEL should be made available and easily accessible to all potential learners, the decision to determine the nature of the recognition will rest with the learner. However, formal certification will normally require some form of assessment.

**We acknowledge that the general principles above are derived from '*A Code of Practice for APEL*', SEEC (2003).**

**Visit the Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) website at [www.seec-office.org.uk](http://www.seec-office.org.uk) for details of SEEC, membership and resources available.**

**Appendix 2**  
**REFINE Project: Phase 1**  
**Organisations invited to complete the questionnaire**

AOC	Association of Colleges
BCC	British Chamber of Commerce
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
Credit East	
Connexions	
Edexcel	
ELWa	Education and Learning Wales
Fire Service College	
Macmillan Nursing	
NHSU	National Health Service University
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NOCN	National Open College Network
NUCCAT	Northern Universities Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QCA	Qualifications & Curriculum Agency
Unison Open College	
Queen's University, Belfast	
Thames Valley University	
University of Lincoln	
University of Liverpool	

## Appendix 3

Covering letter and first questionnaire for Phase 1

As you may know, Continuum has recently managed a national mapping of APEL policy and practice in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This research forms part of a European project – Transfine- which has explored the relation between formal and informal learning. Continuum has now been invited to undertake further work on APEL, as part of a Europe-wide project called REFINE. The aims of the REFINE project are *‘to test the tools for a European methodological framework for the recognition of formal and informal learning; to foster transnational and trans-sectoral collaboration and to build understanding of and confidence in the practices and procedures involved. The objectives are*

*To test a range of tools, e. g. ECTS, the Euro CV, Euro pass, codes of practice, for the recognition of formal and informal learning.*

*To test tools in a range of different institutional and organizational contexts:’*- including FE and HE institutions, awarding bodies, regulatory agencies, youth, adult and community organizations and trade unions.

There will be parallel programmes taking place in 12 countries. The focus of the UK programme will be to develop and test the general principles for APEL and to relate this to the existing European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Professor Bob Johnson, who carried out the earlier work on the Transfine project, has agreed to act as project officer for the REFINE project.

I am writing to invite you to become an Associate Partner in the project – a commitment which will not require a substantial amount of your time – by sharing your views on the ‘General principles for the recognition of formal and informal learning’ (APEL), which as you may recognise, are based upon the SEEC publication (2003) ‘A code of practice for APEL’

Would you be kind enough to complete the attached and return it to Professor Bob Johnson at [bobjohnson@northwoodha6.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:bobjohnson@northwoodha6.fsnet.co.uk)

A summary of the responses will be shared with all partners.

May I take this opportunity to thank you in advance for your co-operation.

## European Project: *Refine. Questionnaire*

Developing a set of general principles for the recognition of formal and informal learning (APEL)

1. Does your organisation have a policy for APEL? Yes ☐ No ☐

If so, would you be kind enough to send me a copy or, if applicable, your website?

2. If your organisation were to adopt the *Refine General Principles*

i) Who would be the 'target group(s)' e.g. Students, employees, member organisations, Institutions?

ii) How could you use the General principles with the target group(s)?

3. Please describe your views on the practicality and applicability of the General principles to your target Group.

4. Whilst at this stage we are not looking for editorial refinements, we are interested in your views on those

Principles which you feel are:

i) Relatively unimportant

ii) Omitted

5. Please add any other observations

6. Name:  
Position:  
Organisation:  
Telephone number:  
Email address:

Would you like to be kept informed of the progress of the Refine project? Yes ☐ No ☐

Please return your responses via email to [bobjohnson@norhwoodha6.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:bobjohnson@norhwoodha6.fsnet.co.uk) or post to: *Professor Bob Johnson, 45 Woodhouse Eaves, Northwood, Middx, HA6 3NF*

## Appendix 4

### REFINE Phase 2: Second Questionnaire for “Deliverers”

Organisations that are **deliverers/providers** of the process for recognising informal and non-formal learning

Name of organisation/body (Please print)	
Name of contact	
Role of Contact	
Contact details	

#### Part A

This specimen Code of Practice for “**deliverers**” is drawn from the draft general Code of Practice in [Annex 1.]

REFINE: General Principles (Code of Practice) for the recognition of Formal and Informal Learning (APEL) – **for delivering/providing organisations**

**1. Common definitions are needed to both safeguard and ensure the highest quality arrangements for APEL services.**

APEL is defined as the assessment/accreditation of certificated and non-certificated learning (including the assessment of experiential learning). It is recognised that there are other definitions in use.

**2. A clear statement of the organisation’s commitment to APEL should be provided and included in all relevant literature.**

This statement could be included in organisational documentation at a strategic level including mission statements, strategic plans and programme information relating to access and admissions to membership and/or educational/training/developmental programmes. It also should be prominent in information aimed at learners including career development, and the programme handbook.

**3. Organisations should seek to embed APEL processes across their learning strategy and policy.**

Experience to date suggests that APEL arrangements can be introduced into existing provision through, for example, the process of review and validation.

**4. APEL procedures and practices should be properly documented and made available to all.**

Responsibility for all of the stages of the APEL process from initial enquiry to the award of credit should be clearly defined. It is important to make explicit the



roles and responsibilities of all staff. Information on the responsibilities of the learners needs to be clear and readily available.

**5. APEL services should be fully integrated within an organisation's quality assurance processes.**

APEL involves academic judgement and can lead to the award of credit. It should be subject to the organisation's quality assurance systems.

**6. APEL policies, procedures, documentation and outcomes should be monitored.**

Monitoring the impact and performance of all stages of the APEL process should contribute to the improvement of learning strategy, policy and operation.

**7. Adequate preparation is required for all persons involved in the APEL process.**

The widest participation of staff in APEL will be necessary. This will require the training and development of staff to improve services to learners.

**8. Organisations should promote the recognition of APEL as a part of the developmental process for the learner.**

Organisations should subscribe to the ideal that the recognition of APEL is not an end in itself, but an integral part of lifelong learning and the continuing development of the learner.

**9. Formal recognition of APEL should be available.**

It is important that the learner receives a clear record of the learning which has been recognised. The format of the recognition could be located on a scale from 'valuing' to formal certification. Although APEL should be made available and easily accessible to all potential learners, the decision to determine the nature of the recognition will rest with the learner. However, formal certification will normally require some form of assessment.

i. Do you agree with the list of principles in the draft Code of Practice for deliverers?

Strongly Agree  
☐

Agree  
☐

Disagree  
☐

Strongly Disagree  
☐

- ii. Which principles would you omit/add from the draft general Code of Practice (Appendix 1)(please tick all that apply)

Principle	Add	Omit
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- iii. Do you have any comments on the wording of the descriptions attached to each of the principles? (See Annex 1)

Principle	No	Yes	Comments (please use separate sheet if necessary)
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			

- iv. What specific guidance would you suggest you might need to accompany the draft code with a view to maximising its use and value?

## Part B

As a delivering organisation/body, you may well have an interest in the draft Code of Practice for the 'bodies that **monitor** the provision of APEL services.

General principles for the recognition of Formal and Informal Learning (APEL) – for organisations **monitoring and overseeing** APEL services

### **1. Common definitions are needed to both safeguard and ensure the highest quality arrangements for APEL services.**

APEL is defined as the assessment/accreditation of certificated and non-certificated learning (including the assessment of experiential learning). It is recognised that there are other definitions in use.

### **2. A clear statement of the organisation's commitment to APEL should be provided and included in all relevant literature.**

This statement could be included in organisational documentation at a strategic level including mission statements, strategic plans and programme information relating to access and admissions to membership and/or educational/training/developmental programmes. It also should be prominent in information aimed at learners including career development, and the programme handbook.

### **6. APEL policies, procedures, documentation and outcomes should be monitored.**

Monitoring the impact and performance of all stages of the APEL process should contribute to the improvement of learning strategy, policy and operation.

### **8. Organisations should promote the recognition of APEL as a part of the developmental process for the learner**

Organisations should subscribe to the ideal that the recognition of APEL is not an end in itself, but an integral part of lifelong learning and the continuing development of the learner.

### **9. Formal recognition of APEL should be available.**

It is important that the learner receives a clear record of the learning which has been recognised. The format of the recognition could be located on a scale from 'valuing' to formal certification. Although APEL should be made available and easily accessible to all potential learners, the decision to determine the nature of the recognition will rest with the learner. However, formal certification will normally require some form of assessment.

- v. Do you agree with the list of principles (draft Code of Practice) for ‘monitors’ above?

Strongly Agree  
☐

Agree  
☐

Disagree  
☐

Strongly disagree  
☐

- vi. Which principles would you omit/add from the draft general Code of Practice for ‘Monitors’ (please tick all that apply)

Principle	Add	Omit
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

As a delivering organisation/body, you may well have an interest in the draft Code of Practice for the bodies that **use** APEL services.

REFINE: General principles (Code of Practice) for the recognition of Formal and Informal Learning (APEL) – **for user organisations**

**1. Common definitions are needed to both safeguard and ensure the highest quality arrangements for APEL services.**

APEL is defined as the assessment/accreditation of certificated and non-certificated learning (including the assessment of experiential learning). It is recognised that there are other definitions in use.

**3. Organisations should seek to embed APEL processes across their learning strategy and policy.**

Experience to date suggests that APEL arrangements can be introduced into existing provision through, for example, the process of review and validation.

**4. APEL procedures and practices should be properly documented and made available to all.**

Responsibility for all of the stages of the APEL process from initial enquiry to the award of credit should be clearly defined. It is important to make explicit the roles and responsibilities of all staff. Information on the responsibilities of the learners needs to be clear and readily available.

**8. Organisations should promote the recognition of APEL as a part of the developmental process for the learner.**

Organisations should subscribe to the ideal that the recognition of APEL is not an end in itself, but an integral part of lifelong learning and the continuing development of the learner.

**9. Formal recognition of APEL should be available.**

It is important that the learner receives a clear record of the learning which has been recognised. The format of the recognition could be located on a scale from 'valuing' to formal certification. Although APEL should be made available and easily accessible to all potential learners, the decision to determine the nature of the recognition will rest with the learner. However, formal certification will normally require some form of assessment.

- vii. Do you agree with the list of principles (draft Code of Practice) for 'customers' above?

Strongly Agree  
☐

Agree  
☐

Disagree  
☐

Strongly Disagree  
☐

- viii. Which principles would you omit/add from the draft general Code of Practice (Annex 1) (please tick all that apply)

Principle	Add	Omit
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire, your assistance is very much appreciated.

## Annex 1

### **REFINE: General principles (Code of Practice) for the recognition of Formal and Informal Learning (APEL)**

#### **1. Common definitions are needed to both safeguard and ensure the highest quality arrangements for APEL services.**

APEL is defined as the assessment/accreditation of certificated and non-certificated learning (including the assessment of experiential learning). It is recognised that there are other definitions in use.

#### **2. A clear statement of the organisation's commitment to APEL should be provided and included in all relevant literature.**

This statement could be included in organisational documentation at a strategic level including mission statements, strategic plans and programme information relating to access and admissions to membership and/or educational/training/developmental programmes. It also should be prominent in information aimed at learners including career development, and the programme handbook.

#### **3. Organisations should seek to embed APEL processes across their learning strategy and policy.**

Experience to date suggests that APEL arrangements can be introduced into existing provision through, for example, the process of review and validation.

#### **4 APEL procedures and practices should be properly documented and made available to all.**

Responsibility for all of the stages of the APEL process from initial enquiry to the award of credit should be clearly defined. It is important to make explicit the roles and responsibilities of all staff. Information on the responsibilities of the learners needs to be clear and readily available.

#### **5. APEL services should be fully integrated within an organisation's quality assurance processes.**

APEL involves academic judgement and can lead to the award of credit. It should be subject to the organisation's quality assurance systems.

#### **6. APEL policies, procedures, documentation and outcomes should be monitored.**

Monitoring the impact and performance of all stages of the APEL process should contribute to the improvement of learning strategy, policy and operation.

#### **7. Adequate preparation is required for all persons involved in the APEL process.**

The widest participation of staff in APEL will be necessary. This will require the

training and development of staff to improve services to learners.

**8. Organisations should promote the recognition of APEL as a part of the developmental process for the learner.**

Organisations should subscribe to the ideal that the recognition of APEL is not an end in itself, but an integral part of lifelong learning and the continuing development of the learner.

**9. Formal recognition of APEL should be available..**

It is important that the learner receives a clear record of the learning which has been recognised. The format of the recognition could be located on a scale from 'valuing' to formal certification. Although APEL should be made available and easily accessible to all potential learners, the decision to determine the nature of the recognition will rest with the learner. However, formal certification will normally require some form of assessment.

We acknowledge that the general principles above are derived from '*A Code of Practice for APEL*', SEEC (2003). Visit the Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) website at [www.seec-office.org.uk](http://www.seec-office.org.uk) for details of SEEC, membership and resources available.

**Appendix 5a**  
**REFINE Project: Phase 2**  
**Organisations invited to respond to the second questionnaire**

<b>Users</b>	
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
Connexions	
CYWU	Community & Youth Workers Union
Institute of Directors	
London Chamber of Commerce	
Marie Curie	
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
TUC	Trades Union Congress
Unison Open College	
<b>Deliverers</b>	
EWNI Credit Forum	England, Wales & North Ireland Credit Forum
ELWa	Education and Learning Wales
Fire Service College	
NHSU	National Health Service University
Queen's University, Belfast	
SEEC	Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation Transfer
Thames Valley University	
University of Lincoln	
University of Liverpool	
<b>Monitors</b>	
AOC	Association of Colleges
ASDAN	Award Scheme Development & Accreditation Network
NfAYPA	The Network for Accrediting Young People's Achievement
CCEA	
Chartered Institute of Marketing	
Edexcel	
HCIMA	Hotel, Catering International Management Association
OCR	Oxford Cambridge & RSA
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
Nursing and Midwifery Council	
SCOP	Standing Conference of Principals
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency



QCA	Qualification & Curriculum Agency
Trading Standards Institute	

The questionnaire was also sent to **all the European partners** in REFINE

## Appendix 5b

### Workshops and seminars in 2005

January 2005	SEEC Conference <i>Pushing the boundaries APEL and Europe</i>
January 2005	Presentation at FACE Executive meeting.
March 2005	Oslo presentation to Norwegian partners and colleagues 32 persons, Youth, volunteer, further and higher education plus minister.
June 2005	Questionnaire sent to persons listed above
August 2005	Discussion with ASDAN representative about the work of in accrediting learning in youth and voluntary organisations (NfAYPA)
September 2005	SEEC Annual conference workshop. 11 people from the university sector
March, June and September	Presentations to the EWNl Credit Forum
November 2005	REFINE dissemination conference Rome. 12 country partners

## **Appendix 6**

### **The Tool:**

The proposed, general principles (Code of Practice) for the accreditation of informal and non-formal learning (APEL).

### **General goals**

- Give a Quality Assurance framework for the validation/accreditation/recognition of informal and non-formal learning
- Provide persons and institutions with a common tool for APEL
- This tool can be integrated into a European credit and qualifications framework
- Create a tool responding to the will of the EU to reinforce and valorise voluntary commitment and participation

### **Aims**

- Ensure transparency in the validation/accreditation/recognition process
- Ensure that the learners and/or their sponsors (e.g. employers) are treated equitably, in a fair and impartial manner by the providers of the process.
- To provide the stakeholders with a their own set of guidelines within a general set of overall guidelines

### **General framework**

The tool comes in three parts:

The recognition/validation/accreditation of informal and non-formal learning for

- Learners/candidates and their sponsors
- Delivery institutions e.g. universities
- Monitors and regulators

## Bespoke principles – Users/Candidates

The following general principles are designed to ensure that the user/learner (or their sponsoring organisation) has access to recognition (Principle 9), has the definitions clearly defined in line with all other delivering institutions in that country and within Europe (Principle 1) and is provided with transparent documentation and information which clearly sets out the process and procedures including the responsibilities of all those taking part (Principle 4). The educational institution (and the employer) should ensure that the key aspect is the development of the learner (Principle 8). In addition, it is expected that the sponsoring organisations; employers, youth or voluntary bodies embed APEL within their organisation (Principle 3).

### REFINE: General principles (Code of Practice) for the recognition of Formal and Informal Learning (APEL) – **for USERS/LEARNERS/CANDIDATES/SPONSORSING ORGANISATIONS**

#### **1. Common definitions are needed to both safeguard and ensure the highest quality arrangements for APEL services.**

APEL is defined as the assessment/accreditation of certificated and non-certificated learning (including the assessment of experiential learning). It is recognised that there are other definitions in use.

#### **3. Organisations should seek to embed APEL processes across their learning strategy and policy.**

Experience to date suggests that APEL arrangements can be introduced into existing provision through, for example, the process of review and validation.

#### **4. APEL procedures and practices should be properly documented and made available to all.**

Responsibility for all of the stages of the APEL process from initial enquiry to the award of credit should be clearly defined. It is important to make explicit the roles and responsibilities of all staff. Information on the responsibilities of the learners needs to be clear and readily available.

#### **8. Organisations should promote the recognition of APEL as a part of the developmental process for the learner.**

Organisations should subscribe to the ideal that the recognition of APEL is not an end in itself, but an integral part of lifelong learning and the continuing development of the learner.

#### **9. Formal recognition of APEL should be available.**

It is important that the learner receives a clear record of the learning which has been recognised. The format of the recognition could be located on a scale from

‘valuing’ to formal certification. Although APEL should be made available and easily accessible to all potential learners, the decision to determine the nature of the recognition will rest with the learner. However, formal certification will normally require some form of assessment.

## Bespoke principles - Deliverers

The code, consisting of 9 principles, for delivering organisations, recognises their obligations to provide the learner with an assurance of quality, transparency and impartiality. In addition, the deliverers should also include in the code the principles governing its own internal quality requirements. Similarly the deliverers will be subject to external scrutiny either by the government or by an independent agency set up by the government and so must have in place the necessary procedures.

REFINE: General Principles (Code of Practice) for the recognition of Formal and Informal Learning (APEL) – **for DELIVERING/PROVIDING ORGANISATIONS, E.G. UNIVERSITIES**

**1. Common definitions are needed to both safeguard and ensure the highest quality arrangements for APEL services.**

APEL is defined as the assessment/accreditation of certificated and non-certificated learning (including the assessment of experiential learning). It is recognised that there are other definitions in use.

**2. A clear statement of the organisation's commitment to APEL should be provided and included in all relevant literature.**

This statement could be included in organisational documentation at a strategic level including mission statements, strategic plans and programme information relating to access and admissions to membership and/or educational/training/developmental programmes. It also should be prominent in information aimed at learners including career development, and the programme handbook.

**3. Organisations should seek to embed APEL processes across their learning strategy and policy.**

Experience to date suggests that APEL arrangements can be introduced into existing provision through, for example, the process of review and validation.

**4. APEL procedures and practices should be properly documented and made available to all.**

Responsibility for all of the stages of the APEL process from initial enquiry to the award of credit should be clearly defined. It is important to make explicit the roles and responsibilities of all staff. Information on the responsibilities of the learners needs to be clear and readily available.

**5. APEL services should be fully integrated within an organisation's quality assurance processes.**

APEL involves academic judgement and can lead to the award of credit. It should be subject to the organisation's quality assurance systems.

**6. APEL policies, procedures, documentation and outcomes should be monitored.**

Monitoring the impact and performance of all stages of the APEL process should contribute to the improvement of learning strategy, policy and operation.

**7. Adequate preparation is required for all persons involved in the APEL process.**

The widest participation of staff in APEL will be necessary. This will require the training and development of staff to improve services to learners.

**8. Organisations should promote the recognition of APEL as a part of the developmental process for the learner.**

Organisations should subscribe to the ideal that the recognition of APEL is not an end in itself, but an integral part of lifelong learning and the continuing development of the learner.

**9. Formal recognition of APEL should be available.**

It is important that the learner receives a clear record of the learning which has been recognised. The format of the recognition could be located on a scale from 'valuing' to formal certification. Although APEL should be made available and easily accessible to all potential learners, the decision to determine the nature of the recognition will rest with the learner. However, formal certification will normally require some form of assessment.

## Bespoke principles – Monitors/regulators

The code, consisting of 5 principles, for the monitors/regulators which will often be government bodies or independent agencies set up by the government. However professional bodies, who have delegated the delivery to other institutions, will also act as external monitors for those institutions. The role of the monitors is essentially to ensure that deliverers provide a high quality service. The service provided should conform to the standards set within the country for the recognition, assessment and accreditation of learning.

General principles for the recognition of Formal and Informal Learning (APEL) – for organisations **MONITORING AND OVERSEEING** the delivery of APEL services

**1. Common definitions are needed to both safeguard and ensure the highest quality arrangements for APEL services.**

APEL is defined as the assessment/accreditation of certificated and non-certificated learning (including the assessment of experiential learning). It is recognised that there are other definitions in use.

**2. A clear statement of the organisation's commitment to APEL should be provided and included in all relevant literature.**

This statement could be included in organisational documentation at a strategic level including mission statements, strategic plans and programme information relating to access and admissions to membership and/or educational/training/developmental programmes. It also should be prominent in information aimed at learners including career development, and the programme handbook.

**6. APEL policies, procedures, documentation and outcomes should be monitored.**

Monitoring the impact and performance of all stages of the APEL process should contribute to the improvement of learning strategy, policy and operation.

**8. Organisations should promote the recognition of APEL as a part of the developmental process for the learner**

Organisations should subscribe to the ideal that the recognition of APEL is not an end in itself, but an integral part of lifelong learning and the continuing development of the learner.

**9. Formal recognition of APEL should be available.**

It is important that the learner receives a clear record of the learning which has been recognised. The format of the recognition could be located on a scale from 'valuing' to formal certification. Although APEL should be made available and easily accessible to all potential learners, the decision to determine the nature



of the recognition will rest with the learner. However, formal certification will normally require some form of assessment.

## **Appendix 7      Authors' biographies**

### **Professor John Storan**

John is Director of Continuum, the Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies at the University of East London, and was previously Director of Continuing Education and Development at South Bank University, London and Founding Chair of the Forum for the Advancement of Continuing Education (FACE). In 2001 he was made a Professorial Fellow at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST).

He has been an influential regional and national figure on Widening Participation in Higher Education and was a member of the NABCE (Non Award-Bearing Continuing Education National Group), established by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 1994, which paved the way for subsequent Widening Participation developments. He has been a member of a number of HEFCE groups and currently serves as a member of the National Steering Group for Partnerships for Progression. He was a pioneer of the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) in the UK and chaired the SEEC APEL network for many years.

In addition to his UK experience John also has wide international experience as a result of his keynotes, conference inputs and involvement in European research and development projects. In 1992 he was elected as a member of the Steering committee of the European Universities Continuing Education Network (EUCEN). Over the last three years he has been advising and helping to co-ordinate the HEFCE Widening Participation policy as part of the Action on Access team.

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**Professor Bob Johnson**

Bob Johnson specialises in advising, validating and auditing education, training and development programmes. Until 1999 he was Professor of Operations Management and Head of APEL in the Quality Centre at Thames Valley University, London. Bob has extensive experience education sector (including External Examiner posts) and in business consultancy, (e.g. market and educational surveys). In addition, Bob has considerable expertise in the quality assurance of educational/training provision in both the public and private sectors. He is a subject reviewer for the Quality Assurance Agency in Foundation and Business related degrees. He is active in many aspects of credit related practice, with specific focus on Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning, APEL, and the credit rating of work-based learning and in-house training. Bob has advised and supported a number of organisations including the Royal Air Force, the Army and the Royal Navy in their successful applications for credit of their officer training courses. His latest works include *'Models of APEL and quality assurance'*, *'Academic credit in Higher Education'* and *'A companion guide to the QAA guidelines on APL'*.

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## **Glossary**

### **AOC**

The Association of Colleges was created in 1996 as the single voice to promote the interests of further education colleges in England and Wales. The Association provides a broad range of services to its subscribers. It represents their interests locally, regionally, nationally internationally. Its management, split into various directorates, provides a pool of expertise on which the sector draws.

### **ASDAN**

The Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) is an educational charity whose purpose is to promote the personal and social development of learners through the achievement of ASDAN awards, so as to enhance self-esteem, their aspirations and their contribution to the community. ASDAN programmes are recognised by the Department for Education and Skills as one of the few major routes for developing and accrediting wider key skills. ASDAN was approved for qualifications within the National Framework regulated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

### **BCC**

The British Chamber of Commerce a network of local Chambers has a Skills Network which is one of the largest training providers in the UK and is committed to delivering solutions totally aligned to the objectives of the business community.

### **CBI**

The Confederation of British Industry has some 10 000 companies and organizations as members and provides a number of advisory (including learning and education) and consultancy services

### **CCEA**

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) was established on 1 April 1994 and is a non-departmental public body reporting to the Department of Learning in Northern Ireland. CCEA places learners and those who have a concern for their educational and personal development at the forefront of its thinking. CCEA's mission is: "To enable the full potential of all learners to be achieved and recognised". CCEA monitors standards – ensuring that the qualifications and examinations offered by awarding bodies in Northern Ireland are of an appropriate quality and standard. It is also Northern Ireland's leading awarding body offering a diverse range of qualifications.

**Credit East**

Credit East was (2000-2003) a consortium of universities and colleges in the east of England whose aim was to establish a regional credit framework to recognise learning wherever it took place.

**Connexions**

Connexions offers a range of guidance and support for 13 to 19 year olds to help make the transition to adult life a smooth one. Connexions will improve the employability of young people and help them to overcome barriers to success in the modern working world, which is why close collaboration with employers is central to the service's development.

**CYWU**

Community & Youth Workers Union Trade union for youth and community workers, play workers, mentors and personal advisors. They are a modern union interested in the highest standards of delivery in youth, community and play work and personal advice work. They provide training and support to members on a variety of work and professional issues.

**Edexcel**

Edexcel was formed in 1996 by the merger of two well-respected bodies, BTEC (the Business & Technology Education Council) and ULEAC (the University of London Examinations and Assessment Council). Both were leaders in their respective fields of academic and vocational qualifications. Now Edexcel provides a very wide range of qualifications to cater for all needs and learning styles and believes strongly in the parity of esteem of vocational and general qualifications.

**ELWa**

Education and Learning in Wales, ELWa, is a government department which inter alia funds and supports the Credit and Qualifications Framework in Wales, which encompasses all forms of learning both formal and informal.

**EWNI**

England Wales and Northern Ireland

**Fire Service College**

The Fire Service College provides unique facilities for both practical and theoretical fire fighting, fire safety and accident emergency training. Established on this site in 1968, the College has built its reputation as the premier fire related training establishment in the world, both in terms of the calibre and experience of its teaching staff and the scenarios it can offer.

**LSDA**

Learning and Skills Development Agency, LSDA's mission is to improve the quality of post-16 education and training in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We do this

through research to inform policy and practice, through helping to shape and communicate education policy and through improvement and support programmes for organisations that deliver post-16 education and training.

### **Macmillan Cancer Care**

Our education programme helps Macmillan health and social care professionals become leaders in their field through ongoing development and training. Macmillan works with you to identify your individual needs and provides ongoing support.

### **NfAYPA**

The Network for Accrediting Young People's Achievement, NfAYPA, was formed in 1998 by the National Youth Agency together with a range of key national accrediting bodies to accredit young people's learning in non-formal settings. Current members are AQA, ASDAN, Chrysalis, Connect Youth, Duke of Edinburgh Award, Fairbridge, Getting Connected (YALP), Girl Guiding UK, National Association of Clubs for Young people, The National Open College Network, NOCN, The National Youth Agency, The Prince's Trust, QCA, The Scout Association, Sports Leaders uk, Trident Trust, Wales Youth Agency, Weston spirit, WJEC, UK Youth and Youthtrain. Email: [nya@nya.org.uk](mailto:nya@nya.org.uk)

### **NHSU**

The National Health Service University (NHSU) is a new kind of learning organisation, providing learning and development opportunities for everyone working in health and social care. It wants all staff to have the skills and knowledge they need to deliver the best possible patient care.

### **NIACE**

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education - England and Wales (NIACE) is a non-governmental organisation working for more and different adult learners. NIACE's aim is to support an increase in the total numbers of adults engaged in formal and informal learning in England and Wales; and at the same time to take positive action to improve opportunities and widen access to learning opportunities for those communities under-represented in current provision."

### **NOCN**

The National Open College Network (NOCN) is a major recognised national qualifications awarding body, subject to regulation by QCA (in England), ACCAC (in Wales) and CCEA (in Northern Ireland). Some NOCN qualifications and services are also available in Scotland. NOCN is more than just an awarding body. Through its national qualifications, and through the complementary range of national local services, NOCN seeks to widen access to lifelong learning and develop innovative solutions to the age-old problems of exclusion and under-achievement.

### **NUCCAT**

The Northern Universities Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (NUCCAT) is a federation of some 45 higher education institutions in the UK - from the north east to the midlands in England whose membership seeks to:

- Share and promote best practice in the development of modularity, credit frameworks and academic frameworks
- Promote staff development in these areas
- Debate issues of common interest
- Undertake specific projects on credit for external sponsors

## **QAA**

The Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. It was established in 1997 and is an independent body funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges of higher education, and through contracts with the main higher education funding bodies. Agency works in partnership with the providers and funders of higher education, the staff and students in higher education, employers and other stakeholders, to:

- safeguard the student and wider public interest in the maintenance of standards of academic awards and the quality of higher education
- communicate information on academic standards and quality to inform student choice and employer understanding, and to underpin public policy making
- enhance the assurance and management of standards and quality in higher education and promote a wider understanding of the value of well-assured standards and quality
- promote a wider understanding of the nature of standards and quality in higher education, including maintenance of common reference points, drawing on UK, other European, and international practice.

## **QCA**

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is a non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

QCA maintains and develops the national curriculum and associated assessments, tests and examinations; and accredits and monitors qualifications in (sic Further Education) colleges and at work QCA develops the qualifications framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which sets out the different levels at which qualifications can be recognised, helping learners make well-informed choices on the qualifications they need. QCA recognises and regulates awarding bodies and their qualifications to maintain the reliability of the national qualifications framework. QCA feels that opportunities to learn continue throughout life and high-quality vocational learning and qualifications are the key to developing the country's workforce.

## **SEEC**

The Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) is a consortium of 37 higher education institutions in the south of England, created in 1985 and committed to the principle that all learning which can be judged to be at higher education levels can be credited and programmed to achieve nationally

recognised awards. SEEC has four networks that meet each term, these are: - Assessment of Prior (Experiential) Learning; Key Skills; Health and Social Care Professions; Work Related Learning.

## **TUC**

The Trades Union Congress, with member unions represents over six and a half million working people, campaign for a fair deal at work and for social justice at home and abroad.

## **UK Youth**

UK Youth exists to develop and promote innovative non-formal education programmes for and with young people - working with them to develop their potential. The latest detailed inspection/monitoring report has adjudged UK Youth's DfES-funded Connexions work to be "value for money", saying that the national youth work charity "engages well with disadvantaged and vulnerable groups".

## **Unison Open College**

As the flexible learning arm of UNISON, Britain's biggest trade union, our role is to promote and encourage the personal and career development of our members. UNISON Open College has been established to do what it can to make these beliefs a reality for our members. UNISON Open College is a fully accredited distance learning college, which means all our course materials, tuition and student advice services are independently assessed by the Open and Distance Learning Quality Council to ensure they meet the highest standards of educational provision. We are also members of NIACE the National Organisation for Adult Learning and EADL, the European Association for Distance Learning, We believe that:

- learning should be a lifelong activity for everyone
  - people should be able to develop their full potential at home and at work and in their communities
  - barriers to accessing education and training should be removed wherever possible
- end.



## **Glossary of Key Terms**

**Accreditation** - the assignment of a level and volume of credit to successful learning (SEEC)

**Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)** - the granting of academic credit for prior formal learning that has been assessed and is Certificated (SEEC)

**Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)** - the granting of academic credit for learning which is experiential and not certificated, such learning must be assessed (SEEC)

**APEL** this acronym refers to both prior certificated and experiential learning, (SEEC)

**Assessment** (of competences) - The sum of methods and processes used to evaluate the attainments (knowledge, know-how and/or competences) of an individual, and typically leading to certification (CEDEFOP, 2003)

**Awarding body** - The body issuing qualifications (certificates or diplomas) that formally recognises the achievements of an individual following a standard assessment procedure. (CEDEFOP, 2003 adapted from OECD)

**Certificate/diploma** - An official document, issued by an awarding body, which records the achievements of an individual following a standard assessment procedure. (CEDEFOP, 2002)

**Certification** (of competences) - The process of formally validating knowledge, know-how and/or competences acquired by an individual, following a standard assessment procedure. Certificates or diplomas are issued by accredited awarding bodies. Comment: certification validates the outcome of either formal learning (training actions) or informal / non-formal learning. (CEDEFOP, 2002)

**Civil society** - A 'third sector' of society beside the State and the market, embracing institutions, groups and associations (either structured or informal), which may act as mediator between citizens and public authorities. (CEDEFOP, 2001 in European Commission, communication *Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality*, doc. COM (2001) 678 final)

**Comparability** (of qualifications) - The extent to which it is possible to establish equivalence between the level and content of formal qualifications (certificates or diplomas) at sectoral, regional, national or international levels. (CEDEFOP, 2000.)

**Competence** - Ability to apply knowledge, know-how and skills in a habitual and/or changing work situation. (CEDEFOP, 2002)

**Continuing vocational education and training** - Education or training after initial education or entry into working life, aimed at helping individuals to:

- improve or update their knowledge and/or competences;
- acquire new competences for a career move or retraining;
- continue their personal or professional development.

(CEDEFOP, 2002)

**Credit** - provides a measure of learning outcomes achievable in a given number of notional learning hours and at a given level

**Credit level** - indicates the relative demand; complexity; depth of study and learner autonomy required by a learning experience

**Dropout** - Withdrawal from attending education or training resulting in a failure to meet the course objectives.

Comment:

(a) This term designates both the process (early school leaving) and the persons (early school-leavers) who fail to complete a course;

(b) Besides early school-leavers, dropouts may also include learners who have completed education or training but failed the examinations.(adapted from The international Encyclopaedia of Education)

**Employability** - The degree of adaptability an individual demonstrates in finding and keeping a job, and updating occupational competences (CEDEFOP, 2000)

**Exemption** - the removal of a requirement to take part of a programme in recognition of relevant prior learning

**Formal learning** - Learning that occurs in an organised and structured context (in a school/training centre or on the-job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to certification. (CEDEFOP, 2003)

**Guidance and counselling** - A range of activities designed to help individuals take (educational, vocational, personal) decisions and to carry them out before and after they enter the labour market.(CEDEFOP, 2003)

**Informal learning** - Learning resulting from daily work-related, family or leisure activities. It is not organised or structured (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification. (CEDEFOP, 2003)

**Initial vocational education and training** - Either general or vocational education carried out in the initial education system, in principle before entering working life. (CEDEFOP, 2003)

**Learning** - A cumulative process whereby individuals gradually assimilate increasingly complex and abstract entities (concepts, categories, and patterns of behaviour or models) and/or acquire skills and competences.  
Source: adapted from Lave, 1997.

**Learning outcome** - a learning outcome is a statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning. (SEEC)

**Lifelong learning** - All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills/competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons. (CEDEFOP, 2003)

**Non-formal learning** - Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically does not lead to certification. (CEDEFOP, 2003)

**Prior learning** - The knowledge, know-how and/or competences acquired through previously unrecognised training or experience. (CEDEFOP, 2003)

**Qualification** - (a) An official record (certificate, diploma) of achievement which recognises successful completion of education or training, or satisfactory performance in a test or examination;  
and/or  
(b) The requirements for an individual to enter, or progress within an occupation. (CEDEFOP, 2003)

**Recognition (of competences)** - (a) Formal recognition: the process of granting official status to competences, either - through the award of certificates or - through the grant of equivalence, credit units, validation of gained competences;  
and/or  
(b) Social recognition: through acknowledgment of the value of competences by economic and social stakeholders. (CEDEFOP, 2003)

**Social dialogue** - A process of exchange between social partners to promote consultation, dialogue and collective bargaining.

Comment:

(a) Social dialogue can be bipartite (involving representatives of workers and employers) or tripartite (also associating public authorities and/or representatives of civil society, NGOs, etc.);

(b) Social dialogue can take place at various levels (company, sectoral/cross-sectoral and local/regional/national/transnational);

(c) At international level, social dialogue can be bilateral, trilateral or multilateral, according to the number of countries involved.

(CEDEFOP, 2003)

**Social inclusion** - Integration of individuals -or groups of individuals- into the social spheres of society, as citizens or members of different 'public' social networks. Social inclusion is fundamentally rooted in labour market or economic inclusion. (CEDEFOP, 2003)

**Transparency** (of qualifications) - The degree of intelligibility of qualifications allowing their value to be identified and compared on the (sectoral, regional, national or international) labour and training markets. (CEDEFOP, 2003)

**Validation of informal/non-formal learning** - The process of assessing and recognising a wide range of knowledge, know-how, skills and competences which people develop throughout their lives in different contexts, for example through education, work and leisure activities. (adapted from The International Encyclopaedia of Education)

**Validation** is defined by CEDEFOP as the process which refers to three dimensions:

- the way of identifying the results of learning gained by an individual in different contexts, voluntarily or not, consciously or not,
- the way of assessing these results in reference to a standard,
- the way of recognising the results of the assessment through a public or private “mark”

**Valuing learning** The process of promoting participation in and outcomes of (formal or non-formal) learning, to raise awareness of its intrinsic worth and to reward learning.

(CEDEFOP, 2001 in European Commission communication *Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality*, doc. COM (2001) 678 final)

**Vocational education and training (VET)** - Education and training which aims to equip people with skills and competences that can be used on the labour market. (Adapted from ETF, 1997)

**Work-based learning, (WBL)** - Learning that takes place in the workplace, either formally e.g. training programmes or informally. The workplace can be in the voluntary sector.

**Work related learning (WRL)** - The term 'work related learning' is used to describe learning that is undertaken within academic programmes (undergraduate or postgraduate), where opportunities are offered to utilise the workplace as the situational context of learning. (SEEC 2003)

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